

The Text of Genesis 17:14

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Genesis 17 plays a pivotal role in providing an accurate understanding of the rite of circumcision in the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, and early Christianity. This is for at least two reasons: this text is the first canonical occurrence of the command to circumcise, and it is the only text in the Hebrew Bible that provides an explicit rationale for Israel's performance of circumcision on its male infants.¹ Consequently, it behooves the scholar attempting to assess the significance of circumcision to pay careful attention to the text-critical problems of this passage. One misstep here and the whole enterprise is bound to go astray. Although there are a number of variant readings in the ancient textual witnesses to the chapter, this article will focus on what is arguably the most important textual matter—v. 14.² Given the disconcerting fact that scholars have almost universally overlooked the text-critical issue of Gen 17:14, it is hoped that the careful attention to the external and internal evidence for the verse provided here will lay a sound foundation for further interpretation of Genesis 17 and the function of circumcision in ancient Israel, and subsequently in early Judaism and Christianity.

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¹ See Michael V. Fox, "The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly *ʾet* Etiologies," *RB* 81 (1974): 557–96, here 558. For a similar assessment of the importance of Genesis 17 for early Judaism and Christianity, see Maren R. Niehoff, "Circumcision as a Marker of Identity: Philo, Origen and the Rabbis on Gen 17:1–14," *JSQ* 10 (2003): 89–123.

² For the most part, the textual variants attested in the critical apparatus of *BHS* are neither substantive nor sufficiently attested to merit attention here. Those variants, apart from 17:14, have minimal bearing on the function of circumcision in the narrative.

I. REASSESSING THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE TEXT OF GENESIS 17:14

According to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the MT of Gen 17:14 reads as follows:

וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה
את בריתי הפר

This reading is supported by a number of the minor versions, including the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Targumim.³ Modern Bibles render the passage accordingly, as the selection of translations below demonstrates:

RSV: Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

NEB: Every uncircumcised male, everyone who has not had the flesh of his foreskin circumcised, shall be cut off from the kin of his father. He has broken my covenant.

NIV: Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

NJB: The uncircumcised male, whose foreskin has not been circumcised—that person must be cut off from his people: he has broken my covenant.

Yet, as the textual apparatus of *BHS* alerts the reader, other early manuscript witnesses to Gen 17:14 provide a somewhat different reading. So, for instance, the majority of Septuagintal witnesses (LXX) read as follows:

καὶ ἀπερίτμητος ἄρσεν ὃς οὐ περιτμηθήσεται τὴν σάρκα τῆς ἀκροβυστίας αὐτοῦ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἢ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη ἐκ τοῦ γένους αὐτῆς ὅτι τὴν διαθήκην μου διεσκέδασεν.⁴

And the uncircumcised male, who shall not be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul shall be cut off from his people for he has broken my covenant.

³ *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Neof.* Gen 17:14 are quite similar to MT Gen 17:14, but *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 17:14, states: וערלאה דכורא דלא יגזר ית בישראל דעורלתיה אין ליה מן דיגזר וישתצי בר נשא ההוא מעמיה>ה> ית קימי אשני ("And the uncircumcised male, who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin when there is none to circumcise him, that person will be destroyed from his people, he has changed my covenant"). Although these additional glosses are in a work that postdates the Arab conquest of the Middle East, much of the Targum reflects earlier traditions, as argued by Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis: Translated, with Introduction and Notes* (ArBib 1B; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 11–12.

⁴ Based on John William Wevers, ed., *Genesis* (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 179.

In Wevers's critical edition of the LXX translation of Genesis, the reader can see that the Greek manuscripts are in unanimous agreement on the fact that the phrase "on the eighth day" occurs in 17:14. Nonetheless, there are minor differences in a small number of LXX manuscripts: (1) the *b* family has the preposition ἐν preceding the phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ, and (2) MS 370, an eleventh-century manuscript from the *t* family, has a slightly different phrase: τῇ ὀγδόῃ ἡμέρᾳ.⁵ Despite these variations, all the LXX witnesses to Gen 17:14 refer to the eighth day.⁶

The evidence of a number of early writers confirms that, at an early date, the LXX contained this reference to the eighth day. For instance, Philo (QG 3.52) cites LXX Gen 17:14 and discusses whether a child is really cut off from his people if he is not circumcised on the eighth day.⁷ Further, Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* twice alludes to a version of Gen 17:14 in which the eighth day is mentioned (chs. 10, 23). Also following the LXX, Old Latin witnesses to Gen 17:14 contain a reference to the eighth day.⁸

Presumably, such strong early evidence for the LXX reading could lead some scholars to the conclusion that the MT reading is secondary and that the text should therefore read: "And the uncircumcised male, who shall not be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul shall be cut off from his family for he has broken my covenant." Wevers, however, claims that the LXX reading of 17:14 is in fact secondary, having been influenced by its close proximity to the reference to the eighth day in Gen 17:12.⁹ Although he does not state so explicitly in his discussion of the verse, Wevers believes the LXX reading to be secondary because of the low value he places on the LXX for the reconstruction of the Hebrew text. As he says in the introduction to his *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, "For far too long scholars have treated the LXX as a grabbag for emendations. Unfortunately only too many have treated the note *lege cum Graece* found again and again in the various editions of 'the Kittel Bible,' and by no means wholly absent from BHS, as sacred lore, almost as a divine injunction to emend the text."¹⁰ Wevers's assessment

⁵ For these manuscripts, see Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBLSCS 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), xviii; and idem, *Genesis*, 57.

⁶ See Wevers, *Genesis*, 179.

⁷ Based on the translation of the Armenian by Ralph Marcus, *Philo, Supplement I: Questions and Answers on Genesis* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953). See also the Latin in Charles Mercier and Françoise Petit, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim III-IV-V-VI e versione armeniaca* (Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie 34b; Paris: Cerf, 1984), 122. Since Philo is deeply troubled by the implication of Gen 17:14, it seems probable that, had he known of an alternative reading, he would have offered it.

⁸ See Petrus Sabatier, ed., *Vetus Latina 1: Die Reste der Altlateinischen Bibel* (Freiburg: Herder, 1949), 189.

⁹ Wevers, *Notes*, 236.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

of the text-critical value of the LXX in general coincides with the views of a number of scholars who have argued that the translation technique of the LXX of Genesis is rather freer than that of other books of the Pentateuch; it would therefore be possible to suggest that the LXX translators have added something to their Hebrew *Vorlage*.¹¹ And, in fact, Marguerite Harl argues that the LXX translators of our passage have inserted the phrase in order to stress that the observance of circumcision on the eighth day after birth takes priority even over the Sabbath.¹²

More recently, a number of scholars have argued that the evidence of Qumran demonstrates that the LXX of Genesis is a considerably more careful translation than has often been thought. For instance, after comparing the LXX to readings of Genesis 1 preserved at Qumran, James Davila concludes: "[W]e must take the LXX of Genesis very seriously as a source for a Hebrew textual tradition alternate to the MT. We have strong reason to believe that the translators of Genesis treated their *Vorlage* with respect and rendered the Hebrew text before them into Greek with great care and minimal interpretation."¹³ As a result of these agreements between the LXX and readings found among Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran, the overly skeptical view of Wevers toward the value of the LXX translation of Genesis should not predetermine how one reads the textual evidence of Gen 17:14. As Robert J. V. Hiebert has recently argued:

The overall assessment of Greek Genesis is that, lexically and syntactically, it is a strict, quantitative representation of its source text. Thus the concept proposed in NETS [that is, *The New English Translation of the Septuagint*] discussions of the Septuagint (LXX) as an interlinear translation is an apt metaphor for this book because of the significant degree of dependence on the Hebrew that it exhibits. However, this general characterization of LXX Genesis as being slavishly sub-

¹¹ See Johann Cook, "The Translator of the Greek Genesis," in *La Septuaginta en la investigación contemporánea: V Congreso de la IOSCS* (ed. Natalio Fernández Marcos; Textos y Estudios 34; Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1985), 168–82; idem, "The Exegesis of the Greek Genesis," in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem 1986* (ed. Claude E. Cox; SBLSCS 23; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 91–125; idem, "The Septuagint of Genesis: Text and/or Interpretation?" in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 315–29; Martin Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung: Studien zur Genesis-Septuaginta* (BZAW 223; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); and idem, "The Text-Critical Value of Septuagint-Genesis," *BIOCS* 31 (1998): 62–70.

¹² Marguerite Harl, ed., *La Bible d'Alexandrie*, vol. 1, *La Genèse* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 171.

¹³ James R. Davila, "New Qumran Readings for Genesis One," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins Presented to John Strugnell on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Harold W. Attridge et al.; Resources in Religion 5; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 3–11, here 11. See also Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies 8; Jerusalem: Simor, 1981), 33–35; and Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16–20.

servient to the Hebrew needs to be nuanced somewhat in the light of the Greek translator's periodic departures from his typical patterns to produce renderings that reflect Greek usage rather than Hebrew idiom, or that, in one way or another, contextualize a given passage for the benefit of the Greek reader.¹⁴

Additionally, the LXX is not alone in attesting a reading in which v. 14 states that all those who have not been circumcised on the eighth day shall be cut off, for the text of Gen 17:14 according to the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) also contains this reference:¹⁵

וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ביום השמיני ונכרתה הנפש ההיא
מעמיה את בריתי הפר

And every uncircumcised male—who is not circumcised in the flesh of his fore-skin on the eighth day—that soul shall be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant.¹⁶

This reading is supported by the two recensions of the Targum on the SP, which have been edited by Abraham Tal.¹⁷ Admittedly, these witnesses to the SP and Samaritan Targum are late, the oldest known codex of the SP dating to about 1150 C.E., while manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum are later still, but Hebrew manuscripts in the Masoretic recension also date to the tenth and eleventh centuries C.E.¹⁸ Slightly earlier evidence for the SP reading is found in the *Kitāb al-Kāfi* (ca. 1042 C.E.), which states that circumcision must not be postponed even one day beyond the eighth day, citing Gen 17:14 as it is found in the SP as evidence.¹⁹

¹⁴ Hiebert, "Genesis," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. Elsewhere Hiebert specifically examines the Greek translation of Genesis 17, but does not focus on v. 14 ("The Hermeneutics of Translation in the Septuagint of Genesis," in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures* [ed. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden; SBLSCS 53; Leiden: Brill, 2006], 85–103).

¹⁵ See the critical edition of August Freiherrn von Gall, ed., *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1914–18), 26; and, more recently, Luis-Fernando Giron-Blanc, *Pentateuco Hebreo-Samaritano: Genesis: Edición crítica sobre la base de Manuscritos inéditos* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976), 207.

¹⁶ Reinhard Pummer claims that "on the eighth day" is an addition in the SP, without reckoning with either the textual evidence of the LXX, or the additional evidence discussed below ("Samaritan Rituals and Customs," in *The Samaritans* [ed. Alan D. Crown; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989], 650–90, here 655).

¹⁷ Tal, ed., *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Exodus* (Texts and Studies in the Hebrew Language and Related Subjects 4; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1980); and idem, "The Samaritan Targum to the Pentateuch: Its Distinctive Characteristics and Its Metamorphosis," *JSS* 21 (1976): 26–38.

¹⁸ See Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* (2nd ed.; trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 47.

¹⁹ Translation of Sergio Noja, *Il Kitāb al-Kāfi dei Samaritani* (Naples: Istituto Orientale di

Further, although Wilhelm Gesenius dismissed the value of the SP, believing it to be a late revision of the MT, Paul Kahle rightly challenged this conclusion:²⁰ in light of the fact that the LXX and SP agree against the MT almost two thousand times, it appears that there existed, at the time of the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek, a Hebrew text that differed considerably from the MT.²¹

Both the LXX and the SP agree on the existence of the phrase “on the eighth day” in Gen 17:14; it is therefore plausible that this reading is older than the reading preserved by the MT. But while this external evidence supporting a non-Masoretic reading of Gen 17:14 is certainly impressive, most commentators skate over the textual issue with no comment.²² Moreover, of the few commentators who do mention the presence of the textual variant in the LXX and the SP, virtually all opt for the MT reading without providing a rationale for preferring this reading to

Napoli, 1970), 75: “Non è permesso ritardare la circoncisione oltre la notte dell’ottavo giorno, poiché il precetto della purificazione con acqua non è richiesto ad un tempo determinato, ma il tempo serve solo a far acquistare la purità a ciò che è immondo; è richiesto invece un tempo per la purità che si acquista colla circoncisione in merito alla quale disse—Egli è l’Altissimo—nella Sua Legge.” For a fascinating treatment of later Samaritan views, see Pummer, “Samaritan Rituals,” 656–57.

²⁰ See the discussion in Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 45–47, as well as the general treatment of the SP in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 80–100.

²¹ For this statistic, see Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 46.

²² See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 197–201; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 122–27; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12–50* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 54–55; Josef Scharbert, *Genesis 12–50* (NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986), 145–46; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 473–74; John J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 149–50; Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 81–83; W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 162–68; David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 106–12; Martin Kessler and Karel Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis: The Book of Beginnings* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 112–13; and Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 204–5. Even those looking specifically at the role of circumcision in Genesis 17, such as Fox (“Sign of the Covenant”), Andreas Blaschke (*Beschneidung: Zeugnisse der Bibel und verwandter Texte* [Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 28; Tübingen: Francke, 1998], 79–92), Paul R. Williamson (*Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis* [JSOTSup 315; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000]), and R. Christopher Heard (*Dynamics of Dissection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* [SemeiaSt 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 74–76), make no mention of the textual issue in 17:14. And, while Norbert Lohfink examines a number of text-critical issues in Genesis 17, the important textual issue in verse 14 is not one of them (“Text-kritisches zu Gn 17,5.13.16.17,” *Bib* 48 [1967]: 439–42).

that which is preserved in the LXX/SP.²³ In fact, the only commentators that I could find who believe that the reading preserved by the LXX and the SP is earlier than the MT reading are Gerhard Kittel and the late-nineteenth-century scholar Charles J. Ball.²⁴ Although Ronald Hendel claims that “it has become increasingly difficult for a biblical scholar to be a Masoretic fundamentalist,” discussions of Gen 17:14 indicate just how pervasive such “fundamentalism” continues to be!²⁵

Further, contrary to the critical apparatus of *BHS*, the case for the LXX/SP reading is not yet complete, for *Jubilees*, a second-century B.C.E. Palestinian Jewish work, also provides evidence for a Hebrew *Vorlage* in which the phrase *ביום השמיני* was present.²⁶ *Jubilees*’ rewriting of Gen 17:14 reads: “The male who has not been

²³ See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 294; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 15; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 254; Horst Seebass, *Genesis II* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 96–97; W. H. Gispén, *Genesis* (3 vols.; COut; Kampen: Kok, 1974–83), 2:142; Otto Procksch, *Die Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (KAT 1; Leipzig: Deichert, 1913), 520; Klaus Grünwaldt, *Exil und Identität: Beschneidung, Passa und Sabbat in der Priesterschrift* (Athenäums Monografien, Theologie 85; Frankfurt am Main: A. Hain, 1992), 42 n. 5; and J. de Fraine, *Genesis* (Roermond: J. J. Romen & Zonen, 1963), 149. De Fraine wrongly says that the LXX states that circumcision must take place “op de zevende dage.”

²⁴ Charles J. Ball, *The Sacred Books of the Old Testament: A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text*, part 1, *The Book of Genesis: A Critical Edition* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896), 13, although he places brackets around the words. The textual apparatus of Gerhard Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica* also suggests that the LXX/SP reading ought to be followed. Neither Ball nor Kittel provides argumentation for why they prefer this reading. Additionally, William H. Propp notes these variants, but claims that “there is no way to judge” which of the two is original (“The Origins of Infant Circumcision in Israel,” *HAR* 11 [1987]: 355–70, here 356).

²⁵ Hendel, *Text of Genesis*, vii. Similarly, Emanuel Tov claims: “Although critical scholars, as opposed to the public at large, know that MT does not constitute *the* Bible, they nevertheless often approach it in this way. They base many *critical* commentaries and introductions mainly on MT; occasional remarks on other textual witnesses merely pay lip service to the notion that other texts exist. Many critical scholars mainly practise exegesis on MT” (“Hebrew Scripture Editions: Philosophy and Praxis,” in idem, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran: Collected Essays* [TSAJ 121; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 247–70, here 267 [emphasis original]). See also Tov, “The Status of the Masoretic Text in Modern Text Editions of the Hebrew Bible: The Relevance of Canon,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 234–51.

²⁶ While the exact dating of *Jubilees* is contested, there is general agreement that it belongs to the second century B.C.E. Most scholars, following James C. VanderKam (*Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* [HSM 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 283), date the work to shortly after the Antiochan crisis in 164 B.C.E. Cf. Klaus Berger, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (JSHRZ; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1981), 299–300; and Eberhard Schwarz, *Identität durch Abgrenzung: Abgrenzungsprozesse in Israel im 2. vorchristlichen Jahrhundert und ihre traditionsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des Jubiläenbuches* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 162; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), 99–129. Nonetheless, a few scholars such as

circumcised—the flesh of whose foreskin has not been circumcised on the eighth day—that person will be uprooted from his people because he has violated my covenant” (*Jub.* 15:14).²⁷ To be sure, our text of *Jubilees* is an Ethiopic translation of a Greek translation of a Hebrew work; there are, therefore, a number of possible explanations that might account for the presence of the phrase “on the eighth day” in *Jub.* 15:14.

First, since *Jubilees* has a specific agenda when it comes to the topic of circumcision, it is possible that it added the phrase “on the eighth day” to Gen 17:14.²⁸ For instance, Michael Segal argues that *Jubilees* stresses the necessity of eighth-day circumcision in order to combat Pharisaic laxity toward the timing of circumcision. As evidence for such leniency, Segal points to early rabbinic halakah, which permits the postponement of circumcision when the life of the infant is endangered (see *m. Šabb.* 19:5). If Segal is correct, it is possible that *Jubilees* has inserted the phrase in order explicitly to require eighth-day circumcision. But, since the reading of *Jub.* 15:14 corresponds to both the LXX and the SP of Gen 17:14, it seems highly unlikely that *Jubilees* has independently rewritten Gen 17:14 to include a reference to the eighth day.²⁹

Second, it is possible that the influence of the LXX caused the Greek translator of the Hebrew edition of *Jubilees*, or the Ethiopic translator of the Greek translation of *Jubilees*, to insert this phrase into the text.³⁰ But, while *Jubilees* agrees with the LXX against the MT at numerous points, there are still numerous other points where it agrees with the MT against the LXX.³¹ Perhaps most damning of all for the

Doron Mendels (*The Land of Israel as a Political Concept in Hasmonean Literature: Recourse to History in Second Century B.C. Claims to the Holy Land* [TSAJ 15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987], 148–49) and Michael Segal (*The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* [JSJSup 117; Leiden: Brill, 2007]) date it, or at least its final redaction, to the late second century B.C.E. On the difficulties of determining a precise dating for *Jubilees*, see Robert Doran, “The Non-Dating of Jubilees: Jub 34–38; 23:14–32 in Narrative Context,” *JSJ* 20 (1989): 1–11. The manuscript evidence extant from Qumran provides a *terminus ante quem*, for, according to VanderKam, the earliest extant manuscript of *Jubilees*, 4QJub^a (4Q216), dates to 125–100 B.C.E. (*Textual and Historical Studies*, 215).

²⁷ Quotations from *Jubilees* are taken from the translation of the Ethiopic by James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (CSCO 511; Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 89. VanderKam (*ibid.*) further notes that some Ethiopic manuscripts of Genesis also contain the phrase “on the eighth day.” Neither the reading of *Jubilees* nor the evidence of the Ethiopic manuscripts mentioned by VanderKam is cited in the critical apparatus of *BHS*.

²⁸ See Segal, *Book of Jubilees*, 229–45.

²⁹ While this is not the place for a full critique of Segal’s argument, suffice it to say that I am skeptical of the appropriateness of using a Mishnaic passage as evidence of what Pharisees believed in the second century B.C.E.

³⁰ This is the proposal of August Dillmann, “Das Buch der Jubiläen oder die kleine Genesis,” *Jahrbücher der Biblischen Wissenschaft* 3 (1851): 88–90.

³¹ James C. VanderKam, “Jubilees and the Hebrew Texts of Genesis-Exodus,” in *idem, From*

belief that *Jubilees* has been altered throughout its translation and transmission history is James C. VanderKam's conclusion that "in the relatively small amount of text where the Ethiopic can be compared with the published Hebrew fragments from caves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 11 at Qumran, the two texts agree very closely."³² Thus, even though *Jub.* 15:14 is extant only in the Ethiopic, we can be relatively confident that it faithfully preserves the original Hebrew version of the verse.

Clear evidence is beginning to mount that there existed in the Second Temple period a reading of Gen 17:14 with a wide enough circulation to be known both to the LXX translators in Alexandria and to the Palestinian circles responsible for the book of *Jubilees*.³³ Nonetheless, one final piece of textual evidence, the late-first-century B.C.E. scroll 8QGenesis fragment 4, needs to be considered.³⁴ If Maurice Baillet, the DJD editor of this scroll, is correct in identifying these extremely fragmentary remains as Gen 17:12–17, then the fragment might suggest that 17:14 contained the phrase **ביום השמיני**. Although 8QGen frag. 4 preserves only four letters on the right-hand side of the column—and really only one of these, an *ayin*, clearly—the slightly less fragmentary contents of frag. 1 seem to confirm this identification.

Baillet reconstructs the text based on the four fragmentary letters preserved in a column width that permits roughly sixty-five letters, exclusive of spaces between words. Thus, the first line begins with *zayin*, the first letter of the word **זכר** of Gen 17:12, and contains sixty-seven letters. The second line begins with a *kaph*, the first letter of **כספך** of v. 13. No letter is preserved from the third line. The fourth line begins with a *taw*, corresponding to the *taw* of **תקרא** in Gen 17:15. Line 5 begins with a very clear *ayin*, the first letter of **עמים** in Gen 17:16. Additionally, Baillet believes that frag. 1 of 8QGen preserves lines 6 and 7 of this column; line 6 would then be fifty-nine letters long, with **אברהם** of 17:18 preserved, and line 7, which now preserves only **וקר** (cf. v. 19, **וקראת**), would be sixty-four letters long, exclusive of spaces.

Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature (JSJSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 448–61, here 453.

³² Ibid., 456. For a detailed comparison of the Ethiopic manuscripts and Qumran fragments, see VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies*, 18–95.

³³ Although VanderKam (*Textual and Historical Studies*, 136–38) has argued that the LXX, the SP, and *Jubilees* all belonged to a Palestinian family of texts, he has more recently backed away from this position, believing *Jubilees* to be "rather more independent of the Palestinian family of which Sam and the LXX are, at different stages, supposed to be witnesses" ("Jubilees and the Hebrew Texts," 460). This move seems to have been precipitated, in part, by Emanuel Tov's criticisms ("A Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls," *HUCA* 53 [1982]: 11–27) of Frank M. Cross's theory of local recensions of the text of the OT.

³⁴ On the dating of the scroll based on paleographic evidence, see Maurice Baillet, "Genèse," in *Les "Petites Grottes" de Qumrân* (ed. M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux; DJD 3; Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 147–48; and Esther Eshel and Hanan Eshel, "New Fragments from Qumran: 4QGen^F, 4QIsa^B, 4Q226, 8QGen, and XQPapEnoch," *DSD* 12 (2005): 134–57, here 144–46.

Baillet's reconstruction on the basis of such minimal evidence finds further support in the fact that lines 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7 would each have sixty-four to sixty-seven letters, not including spaces. Only two of the seven lines fall outside of this range: line 3, which has forty-five letters, and line 6, which has fifty-nine letters. The first of these, falling about twenty letters short of the average line length, is particularly problematic, so Baillet attempts to solve this problem by positing the one-time existence of a large blank space on line 3, separating the last word of v. 14 (הפּר) from the first word of v. 15 (וַיֹּאמֶר). He believes that this blank space corresponds to the *setumah* (סְתוּמָּה), symbolized by the Hebrew letter *samek* that denotes the close of a section, as found in the MT.³⁵ His suggestion is quite plausible since the *setumah* does indeed appear in numerous Qumran scrolls;³⁶ nonetheless, the *setumah* would have to account for twenty characters in a column that averages roughly three times that number of characters per line.

I believe that the large gap in line 3 of 8QGen frag. 4 might signal the presence not only of a *setumah* but also of a slightly longer text than that posited by Baillet. On my reconstruction, lines 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 remain the same, but lines 2 and 3 are modified. Baillet has reconstructed line 2 in the following way:

כ[ספך והיתה בריתי בבשרכם לברית עולם ועל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ונכרתה הנפש]

In contrast, I suggest that line 2 should be reconstructed as follows:

כ[ספך והיתה בריתי בבשרכם לברית עולם ועל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ביום השמיני]

The length of line 2 remains the same (Baillet's reconstruction and my own both have sixty-five letters + fifteen spaces for a total of eighty characters), since I have placed ביום השמיני before הנפש and have moved the latter phrase to line 3.

³⁵ The *setumah* was a Masoretic marking denoting the end of paragraphs (or, in Hebrew, פרשות). See Page H. Kelley et al., *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 155–56; and Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 50–52. For just such a *setumah* at the end of Gen 17:14, see David Noel Freedman et al., eds., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 29. In this belief, Baillet is followed by Josef M. Oesch, *Petucha und Setuma: Untersuchungen zu einer überlieferten Gliederung im hebräischen Text des Alten Testaments* (OBO 27; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 262.

³⁶ See the discussions of Hans Bardkte, "Die Parasheneinteilung der Jesajaroll I von Qumran," in *Festschrift Franz Dornseiff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Horst Kusch; Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1953), 33–75; and Konrad D. Jenner, "Petucha and Setuma: Tools for Interpretation or Simply a Matter of Lay-Out? A Study of the Relations between Layout, Arrangement, Reading and Interpretation of the Text in the Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isa. 24–27)," in *Studies in Isaiah 24–27: The Isaiah Workshop – De Jesaja Werkplaats* (ed. Hendrik Jan Bosman et al.; *OtSt* 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 81–117. For a fuller discussion, see Oesch, *Petucha und Setuma*, 181–282. Tov states that "in Qumran texts of all types, this system of sense division was the rule rather than the exception" ("The Background of the Sense Divisions in the Biblical Texts," in *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship* [ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch; *Pericope* 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000], 312–50, here 313).

This change modifies the length of line 3, as seen by comparing Baillet's reconstruction to my own. Baillet's reconstruction:

[ההוא מעמיה את בריתי הפר ויאמר אלהים אל אברהם שרי אשתך לא]

In contrast, I propose that line 3 should be reconstructed as follows:

[ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה את בריתי הפר ויאמר אלהים אל אברהם שרי אשתך לא]

The difference between the two reconstructed lines is clearly depicted above. On Baillet's reconstruction, line 3 has forty-five characters, about twenty letters shorter than the other lines he reconstructs. In contrast to the gap proposed by Baillet, which is about one-third the length of the lines in this column of 8QGen, my reconstruction provides line 3 with ten more characters, leaving us only ten characters short of the width of the other lines, or with a sense division of about one-fifth of the length of the line. Tov provides evidence that such sense divisions can range from two letter-spaces to twenty letter-spaces, but it appears that interspaces of a length equivalent to seven to ten letters are more common.³⁷

Because of the fragmentary state of 8QGen, it is impossible to adjudicate between Baillet's reconstruction and my own—if we only had the first letter of line 3, we could answer this question definitively. Nonetheless, the evidence of the fragment does not prohibit the possibility that the phrase *ביום השמיני* once existed in 8QGen; in fact, it could be argued that the large gap between v. 14 and v. 15, which Baillet is forced to propose, should be taken as evidence that, like *Jubilees*, the LXX, and the SP, 8QGen once contained a reference to the eighth day in Gen 17:14 and read:

וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ביום השמיני ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה את בריתי הפר

Tov has characterized the MT, SP, LXX, and Qumran readings as “the major textual witnesses” to the OT.³⁸ Similarly, in spite of his cautious view regarding the value of the LXX, Wevers states:

This is not to suggest that the parent text which [the LXX translators of Genesis] had was in every respect the consonantal text of BHS, but rather that Hebrew text criticism should be more responsible, and more solidly based on real evidence. We do have Qumran fragments of Genesis, as well as other ancient witnesses such as the Samaritan Hebrew text and the Targums, as well as the Genesis Apocryphon; these must be carefully compared throughout.³⁹

As stated above, however, few commentators even note that other important witnesses attest to a text of Gen 17:14 that differs from the MT. Again, of those who do note this difference, only two scholars, Ball and Kittel, have sided against the

³⁷ Tov, “Sense Divisions,” 316.

³⁸ Tov, *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint*, 272.

³⁹ Wevers, *Notes*, xiii.

MT. The argument I have been making, thus far on external grounds alone, has put to the test this unquestioned preference for the MT's reading of Gen 17:14 and found it to be wanting. *Jubilees*, the LXX, and the SP (and possibly 8QGen frag. 4) suggest the widespread existence of a Hebrew *Vorlage* of Gen 17:14 in which the phrase **ביום השמיני** existed. Critical texts, translations, and scholarly commentary on the book of Genesis must begin to take the external evidence for the non-Masoretic reading seriously.

II. INTERNAL EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE LXX/SP READING

The external evidence for the reading of Gen 17:14 that contains a reference to the eighth day is indeed weighty, but internal criteria also need to be evaluated. Most importantly, any argument for the priority of one reading over the other must provide an account for the existence of the other variant. Can we provide a compelling reason for the existence of the reference to the eighth day in the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* if the MT preserves the better reading? Or, if we believe the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* preserve the better reading, can we explain the existence of the MT reading?

Argumentation provided by those who prefer the MT reading of Gen 17:14 has been virtually negligible: I have found only two explanations for the existence of the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading. First, Wevers claims that the phrase "on the eighth day" was added to the LXX of Gen 17:14 because of the close proximity of the phrase **בן שמנת ימים** (LXX: *παίδιον ὁκτὼ ἡμερῶν*) in 17:12.⁴⁰ Yet this solution is far from compelling, since it does not explain the existence of similar readings in the SP and *Jubilees*. Further, this cannot be a straightforward case of dittography, since 17:12 reads **בן שמנת ימים** (LXX: *παίδιον ὁκτὼ ἡμερῶν*), while the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading of 17:14 contains the phrase **ביום השמיני** (LXX: *τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ*). Second, Harl suggests that the LXX translators inserted the phrase "on the eighth day" in order to clarify the fact that circumcision takes precedence over Sabbath observance.⁴¹ Again, this solution is unsatisfactory, since it, too, does not take into account the textual evidence of the SP and *Jubilees*. Additionally, why would the LXX translators feel required to insert this phrase, when Gen 17:12 already stipulates that circumcision occur on the eighth day? If they felt that it was necessary to make clear that circumcision superseded Sabbath rest, would they not have made this point more explicitly? In fact, our sources evidence no dispute regarding whether circumcision should take place on the Sabbath.⁴² The explanations of Wevers and Harl fail to convince and unwittingly thereby further prob-

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 236.

⁴¹ Harl, *La Bible d'Alexandrie*, 171.

⁴² Cf. John 7:22–23; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 27; *m. Ned.* 3:11; and *b. Šabb.* 132a, the latter of which contains a dispute about whether the preliminaries of circumcision can take place on the Sabbath but acknowledges that "as for circumcision itself, all hold that it supersedes the Sabbath."

lematize the suggestion that the MT preserves an older reading. In contrast, there are two possible solutions that cogently explain the existence of the MT reading based on the assumption of the priority of the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading.

First, although the principle of *lectio brevior* would suggest that the MT reading is to be preferred, it is possible that haplography occurred due to homoeoteleuton, thus unintentionally shortening the text of Gen 17:14.⁴³ The Hebrew reading preserved by the LXX, the SP, and *Jubilees* is as follows:

וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ביום השמיני ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה את בריתי הפר

It is possible that a scribe made an unintentional error by mistakenly skipping from the *waw* at the end of ערלתו to the *waw* at the beginning of ונכרתה.⁴⁴ If the eye of the scribe mistook these two *waws*, the resulting text would lack the phrase ביום השמיני.⁴⁵ A different haplographic error, albeit one with the same result, could have occurred if the scribe confused the *yod* at the end of השמיני with the *waw* at the end of ערלתו, thereby accidentally omitting the phrase ביום השמיני. That such a mistake could occur is indicated by evidence from Qumran, since Tov points out that in a number of manuscripts “it is very difficult to distinguish between *waw* and *yod*, especially when they are joined to other letters.”⁴⁶ If a scribe who had just copied the word ערלתו mistook the *yod* of השמיני for the *waw* of ערלתו, the phrase ביום השמיני would be omitted. In fact, the particular combination of a *waw* or *yod* with a *nun* or *taw* often caused confusion because of the ligature that is formed.⁴⁷ Since *taw* precedes the *waw* of ערלתו and *nun* precedes the *yod* of השמיני there is an even greater likelihood that homoeoteleuton may have caused haplography here. Although these solutions are conjectural, they provide two plausible explanations for how the MT variant may have arisen as a result of human error.

⁴³ For a criticism of the principle of *lectio brevior*, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 305–7.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Melvin K. H. Peters for bringing this possibility to my attention.

⁴⁵ For such a textual omission in the MT, see Gen 4:8, and the discussion of Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 236–37.

⁴⁶ Examples of texts in which *waw* and *yod* look remarkably similar include 11QPs^a (discussed by Mark S. Smith, “How to Write a Poem: The Case of Psalm 151A [11QPs^a 28.3–12],” in *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira: Proceedings of a Symposium held at Leiden University 11–14 December 1995* [ed. T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde; STDJ 26; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 182–208), and 1QS 2:12, 20, and 23. Additionally, Ada Yardeni (“A Draft of a Deed on an Ostrakon from Khirbet Qumrân,” *IEJ* 47 [1997]: 233–37, here 234) discusses an ostrakon in which *yod* and *waw* “are identical in structure.” See the general discussion of Elisha Qimron, “The Distinction between *Waw* and *Yod* in the Qumran Scrolls” (in Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 18 (1973): 112–22. I am grateful to Bennie H. Reynolds III for the references in this and the following note.

⁴⁷ 4Q388a may evidence such an error, since it contains the anomalous verbal form ונתתו (see 4Q388a 7 II, 5). It is possible that this form is erroneous and that the correct form was originally the first common singular, ונתתי, although Devorah Dimant suggests that this is a defective spelling for the phrase ונתתיו (*Qumran Cave 4, XXI: Parabiblical Texts*, part 4, *Pseudo-Prophetic Texts* [DJD 30; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001], 211).

A second explanation for the existence of the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading is that the variant of the MT may have arisen not as the result of human error but as the result of a conscious attempt on the part of a scribe to modify the text for a variety of theological reasons.

First, if a male who is not circumcised on the eighth day is to be cut off from his people, what then is to be done about the sick infant who cannot undergo the stress of eighth-day circumcision? In contrast to the harsh implications of the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading, the Mishnah preserves humane regulations to protect sickly infants from the stress of circumcision. *M. Šabbat* 19:5 permits the circumcision of an infant to take place, depending on the circumstances, anytime from the eighth day to the twelfth day, while deferring circumcision indefinitely if it might threaten the life of an ill newborn.⁴⁸ If it was common to defer circumcision under such conditions, the text of Gen 17:14 might have been altered to accommodate this practice.

Second, the variant preserved in the MT could be explained by the fact that many Jews in the Second Temple and early rabbinic periods were open to the possibility of Gentile conversion to Judaism (see Jdt 14:10; LXX Esth 8:17; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.38–45, 139; *Vita* 113).⁴⁹ Integral to the conversion process, at least for males, was the rite of circumcision.⁵⁰ If males needed to be circumcised on the eighth day, then proselyte circumcision would be invalid and of no covenantal significance. That eighth-day circumcision could function to exclude the possibility of conversion can be seen in *Jubilees*, which states:

This law is (valid) for all history forever. There is no circumcision of days, nor omitting any day of the eight days because it is an eternal ordinance ordained and written on the heavenly tablets. Anyone who is born, the flesh of whose pri-

⁴⁸ See also, e.g., *b. Šabb.* 134a and *b. Yebam.* 64b. I take it that this rabbinic innovation is based on the belief that God's commandments regarding infant circumcision were motivated by compassion and concern for life, a belief preserved in *Deut. Rab.* 6:1: "And why is an infant circumcised on the eighth day? Because God had compassion upon him in delaying the circumcision until he should have gained strength" (all translations of the *Midrash Rabbah* are taken from H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah* [10 vols.; London: Soncino, 1939]). A similar concern for compassion can be found in Philo's preference of infant circumcision over adolescent circumcision (*QG* 3.48).

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Bernhard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (Hebrew Union College Alumni Publications 1; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939); William G. Braude, *Jewish Proselyting in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era* (Brown University Studies 6; Providence: Brown University Press, 1940); Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 483–92.

⁵⁰ As John Nolland ("Uncircumcised Proselytes?" *JSJ* 12 [1981]: 173–94) has argued in opposition to the claims of Neil J. McEleney ("Conversion, Circumcision and the Law," *NTS* 20 [1974]: 319–41).

vate parts has not been circumcised by⁵¹ the eighth day, does not belong to the people of the pact which the Lord made with Abraham but to the people (meant for) destruction. Moreover, there is no sign on him that he belongs to the Lord, but (he is meant) for destruction, for being destroyed from the earth, and for being uprooted from the earth because he has violated the covenant of the Lord our God. (15:25–26)

Given the general openness to Gentile circumcision during the Second Temple and rabbinic periods, it seems more probable that “on the eighth day” was purposefully omitted from manuscripts of Genesis than that it was purposefully added.

Finally, the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading of Gen 17:14 is problematic even apart from the social and historical realities facing Jews in the Second Temple and early rabbinic periods. If every male who is not circumcised on the eighth day is to be cut off from his people, what is the implication for Abraham, who, according to Gen 17:24, is circumcised at the age of ninety-nine?⁵² This difficulty does not appear in the MT. Therefore, on the basis of the principle of *lectio difficilior*, the reading of the LXX, SP, and *Jubilees* is to be preferred, since it radically undermines Abraham’s circumcision.

For three different reasons, then, the existence of the MT reading of Gen 17:14 could be explained as the effort of a scribe to tidy up a theologically difficult reading. In fact, we can see these latter two concerns (that is, what to do with proselyte circumcision and Abraham’s tardy circumcision) nicely addressed in the *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Neziqin* 18:

⁵¹ Although R. H. Charles argues that the original Hebrew preposition ב or על was corrupted to ל or עד and that the original meant “on,” not “by,” there is no textual evidence for this corruption (*The Book of Jubilees or The Little Genesis: Translated from the Editor’s Ethiopic Text and Edited, with Introduction, Notes and Indices* [Jerusalem: Makor, 1972], 110). Additional contextual evidence is provided by v. 25, for it is likely that the author, having previously stressed that circumcision is not to take place *prior* to the eighth day (“There is no circumcision of days, nor omitting any day of the eight days”), here stresses that it cannot take place *after* the eighth day.

⁵² Philo shows an awareness of the fact that Abraham’s circumcision differs significantly from Isaac’s: “Now the first of our nation who was circumcised by law and was named after the virtue of joy, was called Isaac in Chaldaean” (QG 3.38; trans. Marcus, LCL). According to Mercier and Petit (*Quaestiones*, 84), the Latin text of QG 3.38 states: “Primus autem existens nationis nostrae juxta legem circumcisae [vel circumcisis, octava die], virtute praestans ille nomen gerit gaudii, Isaacus dictus Chaldaice”. Later rabbinic works also evidence a knowledge that Isaac’s circumcision differed from all previous circumcisions, including the circumcision of Abraham, in that it occurred on the eighth day. For instance, *Gen. Rab.* 60:5: “R. Johanan said: No woman [hitherto] had been intimate for the first time with a man who had been circumcised at eight days save Rebekah”; *Pesq. Rab Kah., Piska* 12:1: “Circumcision was inaugurated with Isaac, for when he was eight days old, he was the first to be circumcised, as is said ‘Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old’” (trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana: R. Kahana’s Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975], 227); and *Song of Songs Rab.* 1:2:5: “Abraham received the command of circumcision. Isaac inaugurated its performance on the eighth day.”

Beloved are the proselytes (הגרים). It was for their sake that our father Abraham was not circumcised until he was ninety-nine years old. Had he been circumcised at twenty or at thirty years of age, only those under the age of thirty could have become proselytes (להתגייר). Therefore God bore with Abraham until he reached ninety-nine years of age, so as not to close the door to future proselytes (הגרים הבאים).⁵³

According to the *Mekilta*, it is Abraham's circumcision, not Isaac's, that is paradigmatic for proselytes, thereby solving the problem engendered by the fact that circumcision is explicitly commanded to take place on the eighth day (cf. Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3).

III. THE EARLIEST INFERABLE TEXTUAL STATE OF GENESIS 17:14⁵⁴

Eugene Ulrich has argued that the line between the composition of a literary work and the copying of that work is heavily blurred. Just as composition was a process whereby a work underwent considerable revision over time, so too those who copied works often added and subtracted material.⁵⁵ As a result, Ulrich has questioned the validity of the pursuit of the original text: "[B]ecause the text of each book was produced organically, in multiple layers, determining 'the original text' is a difficult, complex task; and arguably, it may not even be the correct goal. Historically was there ever such a thing?"⁵⁶

In relation to Genesis 17, it must be acknowledged that the text is indeed thoroughly composite. Even within the circumcision legislation of 17:9–14, Claus

⁵³ Translation slightly adapted from Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (3 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933), 3:140.

⁵⁴ The phrase "earliest inferable text" comes from E. J. Kenney, "Textual Criticism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1984), 18:191, cited by Ronald Hendel, "The Oxford Hebrew Bible: Prologue to a New Critical Edition," *VT* 58 (2008): 324–51, here 329.

⁵⁵ See Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 16. This same point is made by Bertil Albrektson, "Translation and Emendation," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr* (ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 27–39, here 31. But see the defense of the pursuit of the original text in Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 180–97; and Hendel, *Text of Genesis 1–11*, 109–15. Tov rightly states: "We shall not be able to reconstruct the *Urtext* of any given biblical book, but it is possible, and certainly legitimate, to reconstruct elements of that text, that is, individual readings, selected from the transmitted evidence, or sometimes reconstructed by conjectural emendation" ("Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings: The Limitations of Textual Rules," *HTR* 75 [1982]: 429–48, here 432).

Westermann is able to distinguish two major threads in the chapter: “vv. 9–14 consist of the command of circumcision (vv. 10b–11a) and the detailed instructions (vv. 12ab, 13a, 14a). Everything else in vv. 9–14 brings together the command to circumcise and the ברית (vv. 9, 10a, 11b, 13b, 14b).”⁵⁷ Nonetheless, as far as I have seen, no one has suggested that the difference between MT Gen 17:14 and LXX/SP Gen 17:14 (and *Jub.* 15:14) ought to be attributed to the fact that Genesis 17 is a composite text, and that one form of v. 14 arises from an earlier redaction of the chapter and another form from a later redaction of the chapter. Finally, and most importantly, we have no textual evidence that the reading of Gen 17:14 as it is preserved in the MT existed prior to or during the Second Temple period.⁵⁸ In other words, the LXX, SP, and *Jubilees* give witness to the “earliest inferable textual state” of Gen 17:14.

The external evidence supporting the reading of Gen 17:14 that contains a reference to the eighth day is overwhelming and ought to be preferred to the MT

⁵⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 263. Similarly, Grünwaldt believes that the Priestly *Grundschrift* is represented by vv. 9a α , 10a α , b, 11, 12a, 13b, 14a α , b, which has been supplemented by vv. 9a β , b, 10a β , 12b, 13a, 14a β (*Exil und Identität*, 42–44). More recently, Saul M. Olyan has argued that vv. 8b, 10, 11–12, 13b, and 14 are from the Holiness School, while v. 9, and parts of 10b, 12b, and 13a are from P (*Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000], 154–55 n. 23). See also Peter Weimar, “Gen 17 und die priesterschriftliche Abrahamgeschichte,” *ZAW* 100 (1988): 22–60. Although sorting out the source-critical issues of Gen 17:9–14 is immensely difficult, none of these scholars argues that the phrase ביום השמיני alone was added to a Priestly *Grundschrift* that resembled the MT reading of Gen 17:14.

⁵⁸ Additionally, I can find no evidence of the reading preserved in the MT in either the Mishnah or the Tosefta. Contrary to Jacob Neusner’s translation of *t. Šabb.* 15:9, the citation of Gen 17:14 ends at the words “his foreskin” (ערלתו) and thus does not make clear whether it knows the MT reading or the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading (*The Tosefta: Translated from Hebrew with a New Introduction* [2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 1:415). Cf. Saul Lieberman, ed., *Tosefta Ki-Feshutah* (10 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–88), 2:71. In fact, *t. Šabb.* 15:9 seems to evidence a knowledge of a text of Gen 17:14 similar to the LXX/SP/*Jubilees* reading: “R. Eliezer says, ‘As to circumcision, on account of which they override the prohibitions of the Sabbath, why is this so?’ It is because they are liable to extirpation [כרת] if it is not done on time [לאחר זמן].” The connection between being cut off (כרת) and circumcising on the eighth day even if it is the Sabbath could suggest that R. Eliezer (if the saying does indeed go back to him) knows a non-MT variant. The earliest rabbinic text that clearly cites the MT version of Gen 17:14 is *b. Qidd.* 29a, which contains the following quotation from Gen 17:14: וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ונכרתה. In this, the manuscript evidence (Oxford Opp. 248 [367], Munich 95, Vatican 111) is unanimous. Interestingly, *b. Yebam.* 72b asks the following question: “Is there any authority who maintains that the duty to circumcise a child whose proper time of circumcision had passed is only Rabbinical! But the fact is that (all the world agrees) the circumcision of a *mashuk* [that is, a circumcised male whose prepuce has been drawn forward to cover up the corona] is a Rabbinical ordinance, and that the duty to circumcise a child whose proper time of circumcision has passed, is Pentateuchal.”

reading. Additionally, no satisfactory explanation can be provided for the way in which the reading preserved in the LXX, the SP, and *Jubilees* came into existence if the MT reading is original. On the other hand, I have provided a number of different possibilities (whether through human error or intentional modification of a theologically troublesome text) as to how the reading of the MT arose. Since both our external and internal evidence point to the superiority of the LXX and SP reading of Gen 17:14, a critical text of the verse should read as follows:

וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו ביום השמיני ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה את
בריתי הפר

And the uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul shall be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant.